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CONTENTS

USSR-ANGOLA: *Pravda*
commentary 2

THAILAND: Strike
may spread 3

USSR: Soviets give first advance
notification of military exercise 7

25X1

Approved For Release 2006/03/17 : CIA-RDP79T00975A028500010006-9

Next 1 Page(s) In Document Exempt

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USSR-ANGOLA

A lengthy commentary in *Pravda* on Saturday coupled a strong, specific attack on US, South African, and Chinese interference in Angola with a firm defense of Moscow's own role there.

Pravda said the Soviets' role is consistent with their anticolonialist traditions, with UN and OAU resolutions on decolonization, and with the request of the "lawful government" of Angola. Despite tough verbiage, there are signs of some new facets in Moscow's position on the war in that country.

In response to numerous assertions in the Western press and more cautiously expressed reservations by African diplomats, the commentary specifically disclaimed any interest by the USSR in seeking military bases or other advantages in Angola. It called for "termination of foreign armed intervention in Angola," leaving unstated the extent of its own and its allies' current role in the war. The Angolans, in the Soviet view, should be left to settle their future themselves, if need be by consolidating "patriotic and anti-imperialist forces" who favor "genuine independence and territorial integrity."

This formulation opens the way for approval by Moscow of any solution reached at the OAU summit this week in mediating the Angolan dispute. It also is obviously designed to deflect criticism when the Africans convene to review the problem.

The Soviets are harping on the recognition of the Luanda regime by "almost 40 states, including about 20 states in Africa." At the same time, Moscow is giving wide distribution to stories carried in the US press alleging CIA recruitment, training, and support of American mercenaries in Angola. The Soviets describe the tour of Africa by Assistant Secretary of State Schaefe as an attempt to put pressure on the African countries to support "armed intervention in Angola by international imperialism" and to paralyze the work of the OAU.

25X1

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THAILAND

Prime Minister Khukrit's political problems continue. A strike protesting his decision to raise the price of rice and sugar began over the weekend, and debate on a vote of no confidence in the National Assembly may start early this week.

The strike is far short of being the general strike threatened by labor leaders. The main test of the stoppage will come today, however, the first full working day in Bangkok since the New Year public holidays. There is some evidence to suggest that Khukrit's political opponents have seized upon the price rises as an opportunity to weaken the government by encouraging a general strike.

According to press reports, some 200,000 workers are supporting the strike, but so far only the port authority has been affected seriously. Although a number of state-run services reported a high rate of absenteeism, all public utilities are functioning normally.

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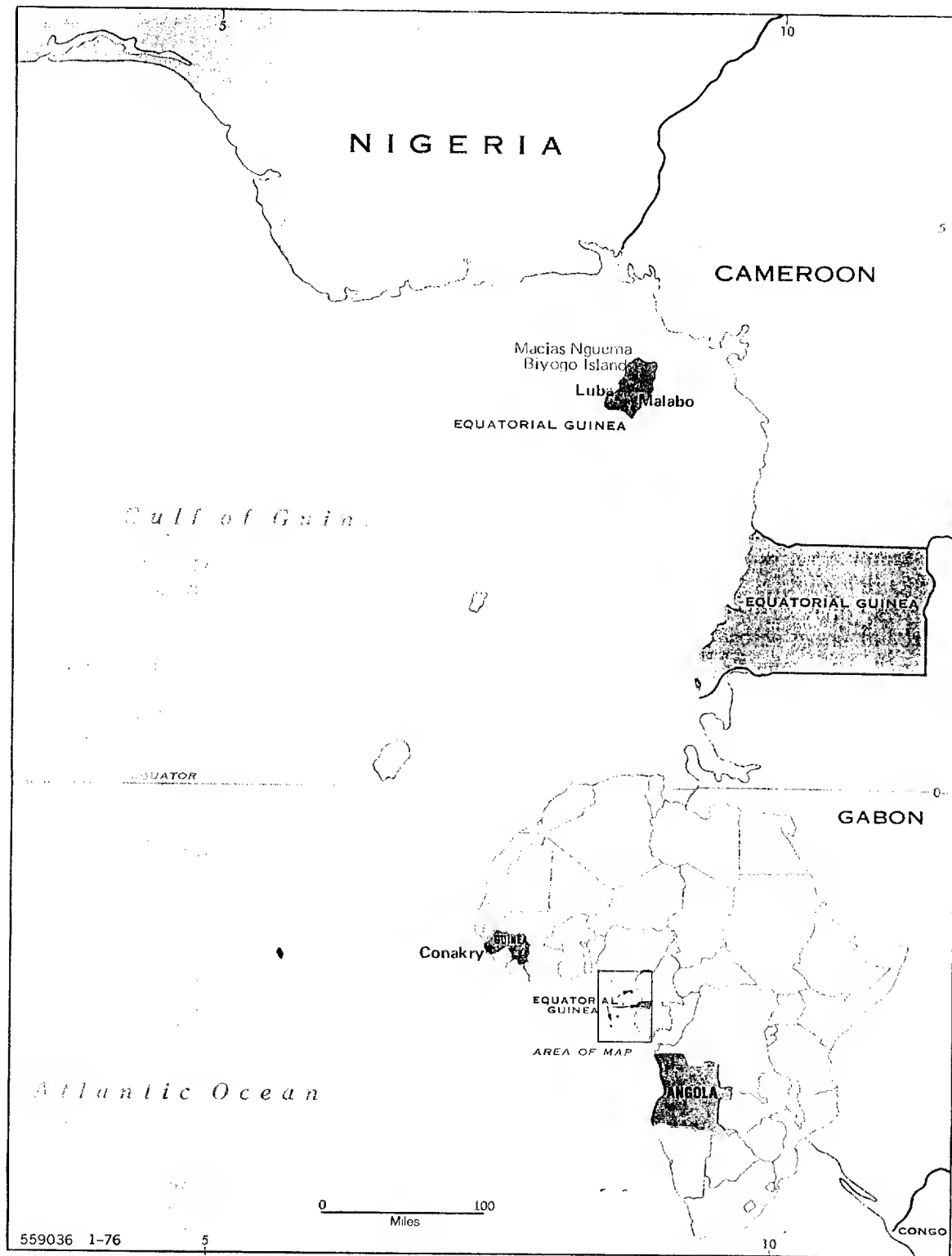
Labor leaders are demanding that the government freeze prices at their current level. The fact that the government has agreed to postpone the price increases until January 15 will likely harden the resolve of labor to continue the strike. The strike leaders have already threatened unspecified "stronger action" if the government declares a state of emergency or dismisses workers.

Meanwhile, assembly speaker Prasit claims the opposition has enough votes to bring down the government when the National Assembly convenes in special session this week.

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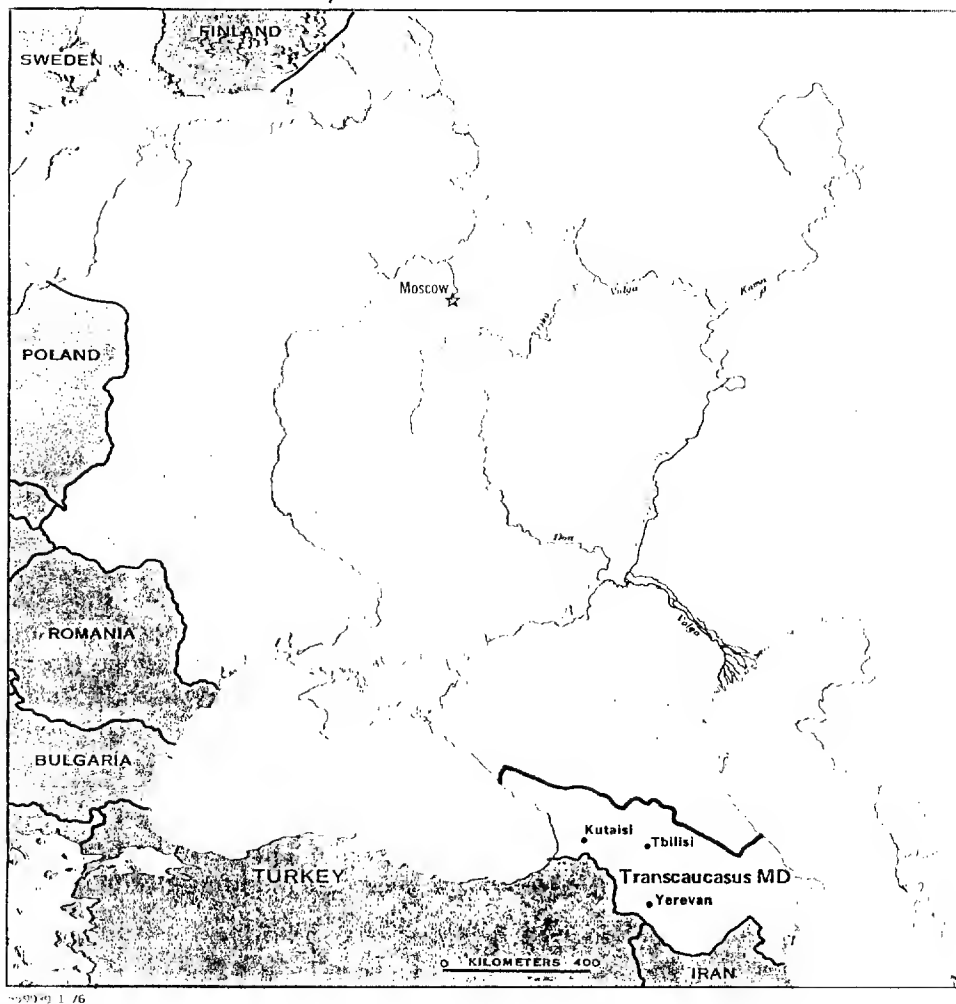
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USSR Announces Military Exercise



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USSR

The USSR yesterday announced plans for holding a military exercise near the Turkish border this month. This is the first time since the signing of the agreement at the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) last August that the Soviets have provided advance notification of a military exercise.

The corps-level exercise, named "Caucasus," will take place from January 25 to February 6 around Kutaisi, Tbilisi, and Yerevan in the Transcaucasus Military District. "About 25,000" air and ground forces, including airborne and "air assault" elements, will participate, according to the Soviet announcement. The stated purpose of the exercise is to improve coordination of these forces under winter conditions.

The Soviets' advance notification, given under the provisions of the confidence-building measures of the CSCE agreement, follows CSCE guidelines carefully. Notification was given exactly 21 days prior to the start of the exercise. The total number of personnel involved could fall below the 25,000 minimum required for notification of exercises within 250 kilometers of another country's borders, but the Soviets appear to be following the CSCE recommendation that smaller exercises be announced in advance if they involve airborne or amphibious troops.

The announcement is consistent with the line pressed by Moscow that "effective steps" be taken to continue detente in Europe and that full observance of the CSCE accord be used to counter assertions by the West that the provisions are not binding under international law. As the exercise is to be held near the border with Turkey, the announcement also could be part of recent Soviet efforts to curry favor with the Turks.

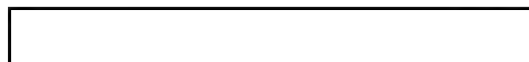
The Soviets have not yet decided whether to invite observers from the signatory countries to witness the exercise.

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